

2008 State and Private Competitive Grant South Carolina Forestry Commission Proposal

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Project Information

Project Name:

Implementation of the Sandhills Research & Education Center Communication Plan

Abstract:

Community Description: Tremendous urban growth has occurred in the form of a half dozen communities and related infrastructure adjacent to the Sandhills Research & Education Center (SREC) located in the Sandhills region of South Carolina.

Hazard Description: Fine fuels, mainly grasses are prevalent along the perimeter of the SREC property and the adjacent neighborhoods posing a real threat to these communities. Also, the forest types which are mainly slash and longleaf pine with some natural pine/hardwood add fuel to the forest annually. These stands especially those slash pine stands bordering the backyards of the many homes pose an additional threat as pine straw and limbs continue to accumulate due to the lack of prescribed fire. Therefore, the need to reduce this threat by increasing the awareness of these homeowners is the reason behind the creation of this communication plan. The potential for wildfires in the area will increase as the population increases and the forest fuels accumulate. The primary cause of wildfires in this area has been children and fireworks; a condition that will only increase as the neighborhoods continue to develop around this property. This plan addresses how homeowners can mitigate this threat, how forest management practices can reduce the risk and how a collaborative effort can accomplish these goals in a rapidly developing urban interface situation.

Partnering Agencies and Groups/Individuals

SCFC; Sandhills Fire Department #24; SREC/Clemson University; Local HOA Presidents; Richland County Soil & Water Conservation District; RC& D Council

Project Location: Sandhills Research & Education Center, Clemson Rd., Richland County

Expected Completion Quarter: Quarter 4 2010

Total Budget Proposal Request \$74,500

Project Expenditures will include:

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|---|-----------------|
| Community Assessments | \$6,000 |
| Homeowner Workshops | \$8,000 |
| Community Leader Workshop | \$1,500 |
| CWPP Development and Distribution | \$9,000 |
| Fuelbreak Mitigation Practices | <u>\$50,000</u> |
| Grand Total of Expenditures | \$74,500 |
| <i>Match with in-kind services/SCFC personnel</i> | <i>\$74,500</i> |

Project Description

Collaborating agencies will work with the Sandhill Research and Education Center by assessing its fuels mitigation needs to reduce the risk of wildfires to the SREC and adjoining neighborhoods. Fuelbreaks will be installed to stop the spread of wildfire and fuels mitigation practices will be implemented to reduce the hazardous fuel buildup on the SREC property. By reducing the hazardous buildup of fuels and limiting the spread, the chance of a hazardous wildfire is reduced. By keeping high intensity wildfires out of the timber stands forest health will be maintained reducing the chance of insect infestations or disease outbreaks. Prescribed burning of small acreages will also help reduce fuel buildups as well as benefit the longleaf ecosystem. These prescribed burns will be conducted once the community has been informed of its benefits. Homeowner workshops will be conducted to raise public awareness of forest management practices while emphasizing the importance and benefits of a well-managed forest especially here in their backyard. Signage and informational packages will be produced for homeowners discussing these forest management practices implemented on the SREC property. By implementing multiple use management practices on the SREC forest, adjoining homeowners will be able to observe the many benefits this forest brings to their community - increased recreational activities, improved wildlife habitat and greater educational opportunities. These benefits are a direct result of increased public awareness, improved aesthetics and greater access. The management of this 530 acre forested tract will have positive effects on water quality, green infrastructure and aesthetics in a highly developing urban area. The implementation of the following communication plan will protect the forest from harm, conserve a working forested landscape and enhance the benefits associated with the trees and forest.

- Introduce the communication plan to the Clemson University staff that will address the wildfire potential and the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) issue surrounding the SREC.
- Conduct Community Hazard Assessments of adjacent and nearby neighborhoods.
- Introduce homeowners to the wildfire potential and the WUI issues surrounding the SREC by conducting the How to Have a Firewise Home Workshops.
- Introduce community leaders and developers to the wildfire potential and the WUI issues surrounding the SREC by conducting Living on the Edge in SC Firewise Workshops.
- Educate homeowners about fuels mitigation treatments within the Firewise workshops.
- Develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) with the local Homeowner Association Presidents, local Fire Service, and Clemson University Extension Service representatives.
- Raise public awareness of forest health issues through educational programs by the Extension Naturalist and the SCFC Insect & Disease Specialist.
- Conduct annual fuels mitigation practices such as timber harvesting (thinning), prescribed burning and/or bush hogging (mechanical treatments).
- Collaborate with interested communities in establishing national recognition through the Firewise Communities/USA program.
- Conduct individual home inspections especially for homes with yards adjoining the SREC.
- Continue awareness efforts by providing Firewise information packets to new and existing homeowners, Fire Service personnel, and SREC users and employees.
- Implement prescribed burning demo plots and conduct mechanical treatments to meet the forest management objectives while showcasing such practices to the public.
- Partner with Clemson Extension to conduct educational programs to increase awareness of the benefits of a working forest. Such benefits discussed will include improvements for wildlife habitat, aesthetics, recreational opportunities, and water quality.
- Use media outlets such as local newspapers, radio and TV to raise awareness of the wildfire potential in the WUI and the importance of having a well-managed forest.

Evaluation Criteria Discussion

National and Regional Relevance:

This pilot project is based upon the rapidly growing landscape of SC where the Wildland Urban Interface is increasing. This communication and fuels mitigation plan can be easily implemented not only on this project but throughout the state of South Carolina. The educational efforts will increase the awareness of a managed forest by protecting the forests from harm and enhancing the benefits associated with trees and forests. SC Forestry Best Management Practices will be used to help accomplish these goals.

Prioritization:

These activities were chosen in order to first make the community aware of their risk and then secondly to educate them in ways to mitigate those risks. This method has been used in the past and found to be effective in getting communities involved. The implementation of forest management practices on SREC will provide the adjoining homeowners an on-going example of how such practices can result in a healthy and safe environment. The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment will be used to help identify those communities designated as high risk, and; therefore selected for implementing similar communication and mitigation plans.

Meaningful Scale

Homeowners within the surrounding communities will be given the opportunity to attend educational programs about forest management and its critical role in providing improved recreation, water and air quality, aesthetics, and wildlife habitat. These educational programs and the amenities of the forest (walking trails, garden spot, farmers market, butterfly garden, pond and refurbished conference center) will help alleviate the newly emerging problem of nature deficit disorder among young school age children. This project area will benefit over a dozen adjoining neighborhoods which contain approximately 1000 homes with several thousand children. This plan can be implemented in rapidly developing areas, which are occurring in all three regions of South Carolina and involving not only private land but forest management on publicly held lands as well. This project can be replicated not only throughout the region but throughout the country where Wildland Urban Interface is occurring.

Collaboration:

The following agencies and organizations will be involved in the CWPP development, educational efforts, and the fuels mitigation practices...SCFC; Sandhills Fire Department #24; SREC/Clemson University; Local HOA Presidents; Richland County Soil & Water Conservation District; RC& D Council. The regional SCFC WUI coordinators will help coordinates these efforts.

Outcomes:

The desired outcomes will be measured by the following outputs:

Community assessments completed - 6

Community Wildfire Protection Plans developed – 6

How to Have a Firewise Home Workshops conducted; numbers of **(4)** and attendance (100)

Living on the Edge in South Carolina Workshops; numbers of **(1)** and attendance (25)

Fuels mitigation projects completed around the perimeter of the SREC property (linear feet constructed) and fuels reduction practices completed within the pine stands (acres treated).

By implementing this communication and fuels mitigation plan the risk to the communities in the interface with SREC will be reduced and the public will be more aware of the potential wildfire danger. The public will also have a greater awareness of the benefits of a well-managed forest as they observe it first-hand. This will be a direct result of the cooperative and collaborative effort among government agencies (Forestry, Soil and Water, RC&D, and Extension), local Homeowner Association, and the local Fire Service.

Technology:

By using the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and GPS equipment we can identify those communities at the various levels of risk. Then by providing community awareness opportunities (assessments, plans, and workshops), we can show the community leaders and homeowners how the wildfire risk can be mitigated. The communication plan and mitigation strategies can be adapted to fit the characteristics of the concerned community.

Integrated Delivery:

This project incorporates the coordination of several state agencies and local entities to provide the best service in reducing the risk to local communities. This will be done by providing information to increase awareness of homeowners about Wildland Urban Interface issues as well as provide protection from wildfire by incorporating fuel mitigation techniques.

Leverage:

In-kind contributions will come from time spent by SCFC personnel in conducting assessments, developing CWPPs, hosting Firewise workshops, and monitoring and conducting fuel mitigation practices. In-kind contributions from Sandhills Fire Department, Clemson Extension, the Richland County Soil & Water Conservation District and RC&D are expected as they partner with us in implementing the various phases of this communication plan. SCFC will provide longleaf seedlings for planting on SREC property for longleaf ecosystem establishment.

Influence Positive Change:

As a result of the Firewise workshops, the CWPPs and fuels mitigation projects, homeowners will have learned the benefits of living near a well-managed forest. Also, they will learn about their responsibility in creating defensible space around their homes, as well as observing how their neighbor (SREC) is managing their forestland to reduce fuel buildups and maintain a healthy and productive forest. The knowledge gained and lessons learned by the homeowners will allow them to continue to support Firewise principles and good Forest Stewardship. This support will provide opportunities for promoting these practices in like communities throughout the state.

Timeliness

Summer 2008: complete hazard assessments of communities adjacent to SREC.

Fall 2008: begin workshops for community leaders & homeowners; complete by Fall 2010.

Fall 2008: begin fuel mitigation practices; establish perimeter fuelbreaks by Spring 2009.

Introduce Firewise Community/USA recognition to communities involved by 2010.